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ABSTRACT

The Wayne State University Library system is faced with a declining budget for at least the next year and a half, and an increased work load per person because of staff attrition and because of increased enrollment. The two courses of action are: (1) Rely on the hope that 1973-74 will be a good year, and the Library will be able to increase the staff to recover losses. In the interim, the Library is faced with almost insoluble space and acquisitions problems as well as declining services and (2) Ruthlessly reduce all duplication of resources and services thus reducing the number of staff needed to carry out routine operations. The time released can be used to remove the backlogs of work that have begun to form, and to study alternatives and plan for the future when expansion of programs may once more be possible. The following operational definition is proposed as a guide for the reorganization that will have to be undertaken within the next year. "The library collections are to be viewed as a unit with their organization to be based on format and our use of universal classification system." (MM)

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WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

University Libraries

Working Paper No. 5

A Proposed Working Definition for Reorganization of the WSU Library System.

January 4, 1972

The Wayne State University Library System is living beyond its income and approaching bankruptcy. This condition arises from the fact that objectives and priorities that were established assumed the average growth rate of the preceding ten years would continue.

1. Our selection policies which were aimed at building research collections can no longer be maintained at the level of development of past years simply because there has been no increase in budget allocation to compensate for inflation and devaluation.

2. The WSU Library system, has in a sense, maintained three independent library units, with the possibility of a fourth being defined. Separate library units must duplicate resources in order to function as separate units. While duplication of resources may have been a minor cost in past years, the phenomenal growth of the number of secondary instruments with the equally phenomenal increase in cost per year to purchase them is competing for scarce funds to purchase primary materials.

3. Although the divisional and departmental organization have advantages in the support of some kinds of user services, the General Library, with three divisional units, and the Science Library, with several subject organizations within one building, require a large staff to maintain the separate services and the especial housekeeping operations necessary to distinguish them as structures relative to other kinds of administrative organizations;

    a. Each divisional unit and each library must have the same "set" of service access points or else they lack an identity as a <u>divisional</u> unit. The difficulties inherent in supporting several service points, all of which technically speaking, do the same thing, are that there is little leeway in staffing; that is, schedules break down when absences

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occur or if staff are not replaced upon resignation. This in turn results in adopting one or both of the following alternatives until the staffing levels are returned to their optimum:

1. Services are reduced--desk schedules are not maintained;

2. Routine tasks are postponed producing backlogs and even errors that become expensive to remove if staff levels again do become optimal.

4. The WSU Library collections have grown quantitatively so that rules of access which once could be stated in a few regulations now involve record-keeping and specialization of retrieval functions that can no longer be comprehended by Library staff, much less by the student or even the long-time user of the WSU Library system.

All of the above are statements that, given the time, data could be collected to "prove" or "disprove" them. Unfortunately there is no time to undertake detailed studying to determine what alternative methods are available and which could be best adapted to evolve an organization that, while not compromising our past objectives, would administratively result in an organization with as good, or better, cost-effectiveness ratio for services and for maintaining our research collections. The pressure of time is caused by:

1. The plan for reorganization presented in 1968 which, while not officially rejected, could not be implemented within the next five to eight years even if funds were available beginning in 1972-73. No alternative to the 1968 plan for reorganization was made then, nor has one been produced since.

2. During 1970-71 a 3% cut in our budget allocation was made; this 3% will remain in force through 1971-72. The University administration has announced that funds for new programs for 1972-73 do not appear forthcoming, and worse, that it may be necessary to make further cutbacks. It therefore follows that even if we had sufficient space in all Library units, we would not be able to continue to operate under our present organizational system that includes duplication of services and resources.

3. Further reduction of funds will have to be made mainly from wages and salaries because we cannot further reduce our book budget without jeopardizing our status as a research library. Attrition of staff has allowed us to remain within our allocation--but at a price: (i) some routine operations have been postponed and the backlogs of unfinished work (based on our previous objectives and priorities) are increasing in size; and (ii) our quality of service has declined because we have not been able to staff all units

according to our existing objectives. In other words, we have fewer people to do more work. This situation will probably continue at least during the coming year and little staff time can be released to undertake the studying necessary for long-range planning while still maintaining the status quo.

4. Work loads in some areas have in fact increased simply because this year we have had an 8% increase in students enrolled. Predictions of enrollment for the next few years do not indicate such a dramatic increase in the student body; the prognostications nevertheless do portend a larger number of students than we now have.

In summary: The WSU Library system is faced with a declining budget for at least the next year and a half and an increased work load per person because of staff attrition and because of increased enrollment. Only two courses of action appear open for the Library system.

1. Rely on the hope that 1973-74 will be a good year and that we find more operations that we can delay or postpone with the expectation that we shall be able to bring our staff once more up to the level as of the beginning of1970 and to increase staff to recover our losses. Such an expectation is not impossible to achieve, but in the meantime we are faced with having to deal with many almost insoluble space and acquisitions problems as well as declining services. Criticisms of library services will increase and we shall have to have the fortitude to argue that our existing methods are the most suitable for the University and that patience on the part of the University community will be rewarded two years from now by a return to our previous high level of service.

2. Ruthlessly reduce all duplication of resources and services with the realization that we shall be abandoning previously established objectives and priorities but will be making an immediate gain by reducing the number of staff needed to carry out routine operations. The time released can be used (i) to remove the backlogs of work that have begun to form and (ii) to study alternatives and plan for the future when expansion of programs may once more be possible.

The first alternative of action above is an admission that we need no change--an inconsistency with our 1968 effort. The second alternative requires an operating definition (in the sense used by Percy Bridgman) of an organizational plan. Obviously, this working paper was written with such an operating definition in mind, but before it is stated, certain priorities and conditions should be understood that the Library system cannot abrogate without sanction from the University community.

1. WSU is a member of the Association of Research Libraries which has only 79 members in academic institutions. This recognition of the WSU Library System's quality could not be relinquished without damage to the University's position in the social hierarchy of academia. The new criteria of membership include such quantitative measures as the number of current serial and journal titles received. Membership to ARL may be lost if the number of current serial acquisitions drops below 10,000 (WSU in 1970-71 received 10,700 titles). In other words the quality of our collections as measured by ARL membership is far from secure and we must continue to invest in collection building at an expanding rate.

2. New modes of bibliographic access are now operational to which WSU does not subscribe. More are under development. We must own or participate in these modes of bibliographic access (i) to insure that we can respond to the needs of the University community and (ii) to prevent further backlons and breakdowns in our bibliographic and inventory control.

3. Since the prime function of a research library is to make documents accessible, any changes made cannot jeopardize accessibility; we may require different modes of accessibility from those we now have, but the changes must (i) be explainable from agreed-upon operating definitions and (ii) insure that reasonable alternatives are always available.

From the above discussion any alterations we make in physical organization must be confined to rearrangements within our present space configurations. We do not have the fiscal resources to tear down walls or add walls; such "remodelling" should be placed within the context of long term planning. Our present reorganization can at best anticipate only the next two years.

The following operating definition is proposed as a guide for the reorganizing that will have to be undertaken within the next year.

The Library collections are to be viewed as a unit with their organization to be based on format and our use of universal classification systems.

(Note: This operating definition can be placed in perspective by noting that our past organizing principle was based on the idea that we could define user groups in the University for whom we then tried to arrange the collections to match their supposed patterns of use of materials.)

Compromises have been made in operating our divisional and separate library organization. Similarly, compromises will have to be made under the proposed operational definition. We have four public access library units of which two were created to support professional schools. Shifting the emphasis of organization to our collections rather than to user groups provides a different rationale for providing access services. For example, storage arrangements would be altered which would make the need for several reference and circulation access points artificial. This in turn would mean that identification of subject specialization of librarians would have to be attained through some other means than through the assignment to a division or a library unit. The technical service operations would also be changed to allow for control over the different storage arrangements.

The full consequences of the proposed organizational operating definition cannot be anticipated without long term study. The time constraints on the Library System preclude exhaustive documentation of anticipated consequences, although we may have to make decisions without as much information as we often feel we must have. This places an especial emphasis on establishing monitoring procedures to enable us to determine if we are continuing to honor priorities and conditions that are determined outside the proposed operating definition.